The Mystery of the Extra Tape

An Everest Reel-to-Reel Puzzle

By Frank Slabinak

Sometimes a collecting mystery begins with something that seems completely insignificant. In this case, it was silence.

While playing an Everest prerecorded stereo reel-to-reel tape, I noticed something peculiar. The recorded program ended, but the tape didn't. There was a surprisingly long stretch of blank tape remaining on the reel.

At first, the obvious explanation seemed to be that one side of the program was simply longer than the other. That is normal with prerecorded tapes. But the amount of unused tape raised another question: **Why had Everest used so much more tape than the program apparently required?**

That question led to a closer look at how Everest packaged and manufactured its prerecorded tapes.

From Two-Track to Four-Track

One of the first clues was the box itself.

The Everest recording carried a **1958 Belock Recording** copyright notice. The packaging also appeared to have been designed originally for a two-track stereo release. Part of the printing covered by a later sticker could still be seen:

7½ per second for "in-line" heads.

Yet pasted over the original packaging was a **"4 TRACK"** sticker.

Other surviving Everest tapes show the same curious combination: four-track identification on the front while the reverse of the package retains references to the earlier in-line configuration.

This suggests that Everest did not necessarily discard its existing packaging when its prerecorded tape line changed formats. Instead, older boxes could simply be updated with stickers.

It is a practice familiar to collectors of many kinds of physical media: when perfectly usable packaging is already sitting in inventory, redesigning and reprinting everything costs money. A sticker is considerably cheaper.

But could Everest have done something similar with the tape itself?

One Standard Length?

Prerecorded reel-to-reel tape presented manufacturers with a practical problem. Musical programs rarely divided themselves into two perfectly equal halves.

A company could order or prepare tape specifically for every individual title, but that would complicate production. Another possibility would be to purchase blank tape in standardized bulk lengths and use whatever length accommodated the program.

If Everest had large quantities of tape already available for its earlier two-track releases, those supplies may also have remained useful when four-track production began. A tape long enough to hold an entire stereo program in one direction in a two-track configuration would provide considerably more recording capacity when used for a four-track, two-direction release.

At this point, however, that remains a **theory rather than a documented Everest manufacturing practice**. No production records have surfaced to demonstrate that Everest literally reused blank tape stock originally intended for two-track releases.

What the surviving tapes and boxes do show is that Everest was willing to carry older packaging forward into the four-track era.

Another Everest Tape Provides a Clue

Looking at other Everest prerecorded tapes revealed another interesting example: a reel combining two symphonies that had also been issued separately on Everest LPs.

The tape contains Tchaikovsky and Dvořák symphonies performed under different conductors. The corresponding Everest LPs even use the same basic cover artwork later seen on the reel-to-reel package.

Approximate program timings suggested a substantial imbalance:

Tchaikovsky — approximately 34 minutes
Dvořák — approximately 48 minutes

The Dvořák performance is considerably longer, yet it occupies the second side of the tape.

There is an additional complication. The Tchaikovsky LP includes an **Allegro Vivace** lasting approximately **10:55** as the final track of its second side. That selection does not appear in the track listing on the reel-to-reel package.

Had it been included, the Tchaikovsky portion would have approached 45 minutes, making the two programs much more evenly matched.

Why was it omitted from the tape?

Without actually playing and timing the reel, there is no way to know how much blank tape remains after either side. But photographs of surviving Everest reels frequently show what appears to be a substantial quantity of tape on the reel.

That makes the standardized-tape-length possibility increasingly interesting.

Recorded on 35mm Magnetic Film

The Dvořák LP supplied another detail that was not visible on the reel-to-reel package: the recording was identified as having been **recorded on 35mm magnetic film**.

That was part of Everest's pursuit of high-quality recording during the Belock era. The original recording medium and the commercial prerecorded tape, of course, were different stages of the production chain. The 35mm magnetic master would ultimately have been transferred for the consumer format.

Another collector suggested that **RCA Victor may have handled duplication for Belock/Everest**. That possibility deserves further research. If an outside duplication facility manufactured Everest's prerecorded tapes, decisions concerning tape lengths and production standards may have been influenced by the duplicator's procedures rather than made individually for every Everest title.

For now, that remains another lead rather than a confirmed answer.

Even the Reels Were Everest

One small discovery demonstrates how seriously Everest treated the physical presentation of its tape product.

The reels themselves were not simply generic plastic reels placed inside an Everest box. Surviving examples show **custom-molded plastic reels carrying the Everest name and mountain emblem in raised lettering**.

That suggests a substantial enough tape operation to justify custom manufacturing or tooling.

It also raises the possibility that Everest standardized more of its prerecorded tape production than might initially be apparent.

So Why All the Blank Tape?

There are several plausible explanations.

Everest may simply have used a standard tape length for prerecorded releases, regardless of the exact running time of a particular program. The company may have purchased blank tape in bulk and accepted whatever unused portion remained after duplication.

It is also possible that tape stock originally intended for two-track production continued to be used after Everest switched to four-track releases.

A third possibility is even simpler: the tape length was chosen to accommodate the longest side, with the unused portion on the shorter side considered irrelevant.

At present, none of these explanations can be proven.

What **can** be demonstrated is that Everest reused packaging designed for its earlier in-line tapes by applying four-track stickers, that program lengths could differ substantially between the two sides of a release, and that surviving Everest reels often appear generously loaded with tape.

The next step would be wonderfully simple—and potentially expensive for a collector who keeps finding interesting titles.

Buy several Everest prerecorded tapes from the same general period, play them completely, and measure the recorded and blank portions on both sides.

If multiple unrelated titles consistently end with substantial amounts of unused tape, the mystery begins to look less like an accident and more like a production policy.

Until then, the silence at the end of the reel remains exactly that:

silence—and a very interesting question.

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About the Author

Frank Slabinak is an author and collector specializing in 8mm, Super 8, and 16mm home movies. His books explore the history of Blackhawk Films and the films distributed to home-movie collectors, including *Blackhawk Films – History in a Box*, *Laurel & Hardy on Blackhawk Films*, *Blackhawk Films Presents Charlie Chaplin*, and *Mabel Normand – The Blackhawk Film Years*.

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